

Section 1

Louisiana Becomes American

As you read, look for:

- the reasons why Louisiana was transferred to the United States,
- the early problems faced by Territorial Governor Claiborne, and
- vocabulary terms **Louisiana Purchase**, **capital**, and **annex**.

One of the greatest real estate deals in history added a “new, immense, unbounded world” to the United States. The **Louisiana Purchase** transformed the colony of Louisiana and its new country. The bargain buy included Louisiana and all or parts of fourteen more states. Almost 900,000 square miles were added to the United States. Napoleon Bonaparte’s ambition doubled the size of the United States.



Thomas Jefferson supported the Louisiana Purchase.

Figure 20 Timeline: 1800–1820





Above: Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue, gave the island its present name, Haiti. **Right:** Napoleon Bonaparte, shown here on horseback crossing the Alps, seized power in France after the French Revolution. His plans to re-establish France's New World empire were thwarted when he could not regain control of Haiti.

After the French Revolution, Napoleon seized power in France and set out to conquer the world. Restoring the French empire in the New World was part of his grand plan, and he wanted Louisiana as the base for his military operations in North America.

First, Napoleon persuaded the Spanish to give up Louisiana. Spain and France made this agreement in the Treaty of San Ildefonso, signed in 1800. This treaty also was kept secret, and the formal transfer of Louisiana did not take place for over two years.

Next, Napoleon sent troops to regain control of the French colony of Saint-Domingue. The French had lost control of Saint-Domingue in 1801. A former slave, Toussaint L'Ouverture, led a revolution against the French colonial government. He controlled the island and changed its French name to the original name—Haiti.

In 1802, Napoleon sent 20,000 French troops to regain the island. He intended to use this island in the West Indies as a base. He expected to take Louisiana and then gain control of the Mississippi Valley, an important food and trade center. But yellow fever



changed Napoleon's future and the history of Louisiana. An epidemic of the disease killed most of the French soldiers in Haiti.

Referring to Louisiana, Napoleon said, "I have scarcely received it before I risk losing it." Without Haiti, he could not protect Louisiana. He could not risk sending more troops there because he needed all of his soldiers for his war with Great Britain.

Napoleon knew the United States wanted New Orleans. The Americans west of the Ohio River needed access to a port and resented foreign control of the Mississippi River. To Napoleon, selling Louisiana seemed to be a good choice.



Spain to France to the United States

Napoleon had agreed to give the colony back to Spain if France decided not to keep it. Spain protested his sale of Louisiana to the United States. But if the Spanish government did not accept the sale, it would be forced into war with the United States and France. Finally, Spain gave the order to transfer Louisiana to France on January 18, 1803.

When the people of New Orleans heard about this change, reactions were mixed. Some were excited to be French citizens again. Others preferred the way the Spanish managed the colony. When they first heard about the transfer, they did not know that they soon would be neither French nor Spanish but Americans.

The French government sent a representative to accept the colony from Spain. On a rainy New Orleans day, at the Cabildo, a ceremony marked the changeover. In the typical formal European style, the Spanish official presented the keys to the fort on a silver tray. The French representative accepted this symbol of Spanish authority on November 30, 1803.

Just twenty days later, the colony watched as yet another country's flag was raised in the parade ground at the Place d'Armes.

Lagniappe

The sale of Louisiana was decided in a bathtub. Accounts describe Napoleon's brothers approaching him as he was in his luxurious bath chamber. After a heated discussion, he decided to get rid of the colony by selling it to the United States.

Map 28 The Louisiana Purchase

Map Skill: What formed the eastern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase?



Above right: In a formal ceremony on December 20, 1803, the American flag was raised for the first time in the Place d'Armes, now Jackson Square. **Top:** General James Wilkinson was one of the officials who accepted Louisiana from the French. He was the first governor of the District of Louisiana.

Above: President Jefferson appointed William C. C. Claiborne the first governor of the Territory of Orleans.



The “Stars and Stripes” announced the United States’s claim to Louisiana. The American secretary read the treaty in a loud voice.

After this announcement, the French official spoke to the people assembled there. He released them from their ties of loyalty to France. All who stayed in Louisiana would be Americans. Cannons fired and troops paraded, honoring a new chapter in Louisiana’s story. Louisiana must now learn to be American. And the American government must deal with this unknown and little understood region.

Louisiana as a Territory of the United States

The Louisiana Purchase more than doubled the size of the United States. All of this new territory must be explored, organized, and governed. After Congress approved the Purchase, it planned the government for this vast new area. Because of the size, Congress created two territories in March 1804. The

Territory of Orleans contained most of the present state of Louisiana. The remaining land became the District of Louisiana within the Indiana Territory.

General James Wilkinson became the governor of the District of Louisiana, which had its **capital** at St. Louis. William C. C. Claiborne was appointed governor of the Territory of Orleans. Although he was young (just one year older than the United States) and spoke only English, Claiborne was experienced. He had served as the governor of the Mississippi Territory.

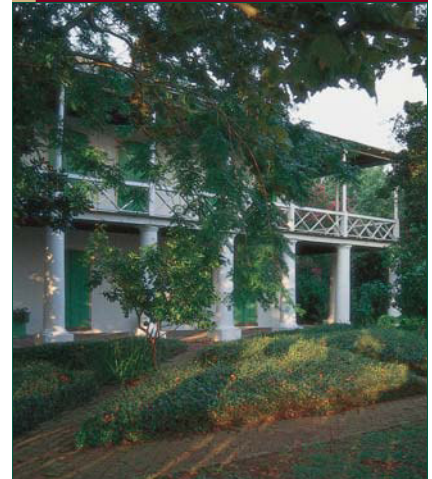
Governor Claiborne faced challenges in his new assignment. First, some of the Spanish officials had not yet left Louisiana. The Spanish governor said he was taking a hunting trip on the frontier. Actually, he was exploring the border between Louisiana and Texas and trying to stir up opposition against the Americans. Finally, in 1806, the president instructed Claiborne to send the troublesome Spanish out of the territory.

But even after the Spanish had gone, their system of land claims and titles caused problems. Land grants had often been given without clear boundaries, and ownership of land was often disputed.

The People of Louisiana

It was up to Governor Claiborne to convince the people of Louisiana to become American. Claiborne called the French Creoles the “ancient Louisianians.” He meant they had lived in the colony before the Americans came. The early definition for Creoles referred to all persons born in the Louisiana colony. In fact, the term originated from a Portuguese word meaning “of the colony.” These French-speaking Creoles were not eager to change. Their strong Catholic roots led them to resist the ways of the English-speaking Protestants who now possessed their land.

Below: Pitot House in New Orleans was the home of James Pitot, a refugee from the Saint-Domingue slave rebellions and the first elected mayor of New Orleans. The house reflects a Caribbean influence common in Louisiana houses. **Bottom:** In this 1806 view of New Orleans, an American eagle holds a ribbon that reads “Under my wings, everything prospers.”



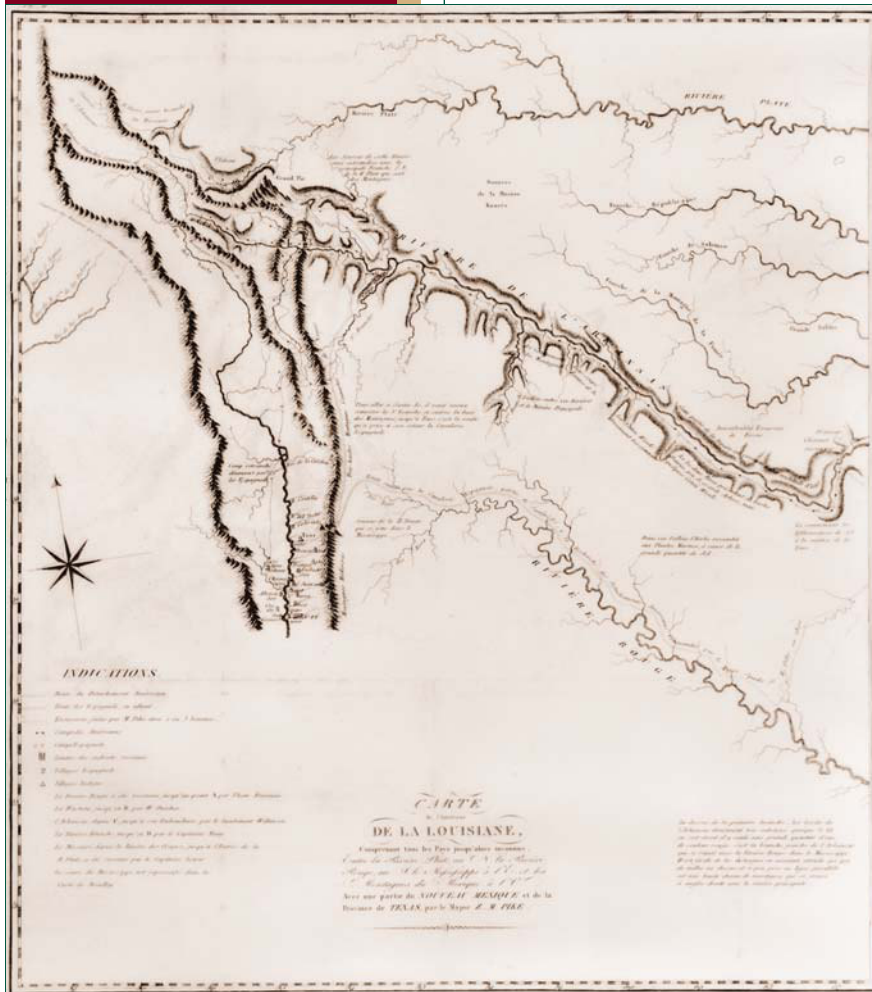


The Hypolite Bordelon House in Marksville (top) is an example of Creole architecture in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The walls (above, left) are bousillage, a mixture of mud and deer hair or Spanish moss. The dining room in the house (right) was one of the two main rooms. The netting in the bedroom, the other main room (opposite page), protected the sleeping occupants from mosquitoes.



Cooper: A barrel maker

Below: In 1806, General Wilkinson sent Zebulon Pike, explorer and soldier, to find the headwaters of the Red and Arkansas rivers. This map shows the results of Pike's exploration of the Red River.



The revolution in Haiti had driven French planters to Louisiana. They brought their slaves, expecting to continue their plantation lifestyle. They associated with the French of Louisiana rather than with the Americans.

Free people of color had also fled Haiti. In French colonies, the legal term for those of mixed race was free men of color—*gens de couleur libre*. Former slaves who purchased their freedom were also identified this way. In New Orleans, they joined a large established community of free people of color. Many families were wealthy, educated, and cultured. They honored their Catholic and French heritage, had their own schools, and attended the theater regularly. Many free people of color were skilled workers in New Orleans—carpenters, masons, cigar makers, shoemakers, clerks, mechanics, cooper, barbers, blacksmiths, and butchers.

Some people in the Territory of Orleans wanted immediate statehood, but President Jefferson told Congress that the people of Louisiana were “as incapable of self-government as children.” Their colonial experience had not prepared them for this kind of government. Under the French and Spanish, the kings had controlled the government, and paid officials took care of government matters. Jefferson wanted to give Louisianians time to learn about democratic govern-

ment. Also, some members of Congress wanted more Americans to move into the territory before they would approve statehood for Louisiana.

Many of the first Americans who came to Louisiana were the “Kaintucks.” These westerners with their different language and strange culture came down the Mississippi River on their flatboats. Because of their behavior, the Creoles assumed all Americans were rough, violent, and rowdy.

Border Disputes

The huge tract of land that was the Louisiana Purchase was largely unknown. President Jefferson sent out expeditions to survey and map the territory. The most famous of these was the Lewis and Clark expedition. Two other explorers, Freeman and Custis, led the Red River Expedition in 1806, exploring part of present-day Louisiana.

The undefined boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase created problems

between the United States and Spain. The area along the Sabine River had belonged to the Spanish colonies of Texas and Louisiana. Now, that border provoked an ongoing argument. Some of the Americans claimed the Sabine River as the western border between the United States and Spanish Texas. Rumors spread that the Spanish planned a push into American territory.

Finally, in 1806, the two governments established a neutral zone between Louisiana and Texas. No troops from either government entered the area. This so-called Sabine Strip became a no-man's-land, a lawless hideout for bandits. Outlaw gangs made their headquarters here, robbing the traders who traveled from Mexico to Louisiana.

The Burr Conspiracy

Plots swirled through the western United States during this time. One of those schemes involved Aaron Burr, a former vice president of the United States. Burr had lost his political influence after he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel.

Burr saw the competition to control New Orleans as his chance to regain power. He expected Spain to declare war to reclaim the port and began working behind the scenes with the Spanish. Later, he was accused of planning his own empire with land he hoped to seize from the southern United States and Mexico. He was also accused of encouraging the western states to separate from the United States.

Burr was stopped by General Wilkinson, governor of the District of Louisiana. In 1805, Wilkinson reported Burr's plans to bring an armed fleet of boats down the river toward New Orleans. Burr hoped to start a rebellion among the French settlers. Wilkinson's letter to President Jefferson led to Burr's arrest for treason. Although Wilkinson was the chief witness against him, Burr was acquitted (found not guilty).

Wilkinson's role in this plot was unclear. Burr once wrote to Wilkinson, "The gods invite us to glory and fortune. It remains to be seen whether we deserve the boon." But Wilkinson turned against Burr, perhaps because he knew the plan was doomed. General Wilkinson was apparently a double agent, working with the Spanish while he served the United States. He had arranged the compromise that established the Sabine Strip. Some historians now suggest that he was working for both sides at the time.

The West Florida Revolt

West Florida was not included in the Louisiana Purchase; it remained Spanish. West Florida included the part of the state on the east side of the Mississippi River today called "the Florida Parishes." These parishes include East Baton



Map 29 The Neutral Zone

Map Skill: Why do you think this area was a lawless region?

Lagniappe

The neutral zone extended roughly from the Sabine River east to the Calcasieu River, Bayous Kisatchie and Don Manuel, Lac Terre Noir (present-day Sibley Lake), and the Arroyo Hondo (a dry gulch west of Natchitoches).



Map 30 The Florida Parishes

Map Skill: What was the eastern boundary of the Florida parishes?

Anglo is a term for Americans of English descent.

Rouge, East Feliciana, Livingston, St. Helena, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Washington, and West Feliciana. New Orleans was the only place east of the Mississippi River that was included in the Louisiana Purchase.

However, from the time of the Louisiana Purchase until the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, Spain and the United States disputed the ownership of the West Florida area. The area had not been clearly specified when the land was transferred from Spain to France, and it was not mentioned in the Purchase.

Many English-speaking settlers lived in Spanish West Florida. They were disappointed when West Florida was not included in the Louisiana Purchase and talked of rebelling against the Spanish. Fort San Carlos, the fort on the east side of the river at Baton Rouge was the closest Spanish authority. As early as 1804, just a year after the Louisiana Purchase, the settlers tried to seize the fort. They failed but did not end their plotting. In 1810, they were ready to try again. By then, Americans were in the majority in Spanish West Florida.

Unrest in Spain gave them the reason they needed to rebel against the Spanish government. Napoleon had invaded Spain in 1808 and made his brother the new king. The Anglos in Spanish West Florida said they took action because they opposed this new Spanish government.

Fort San Carlos was still in Spanish hands. Seventy men, led by Philemon

Lagniappe

At the same time as the military action, a convention at St. Francisville declared the independence of the Florida Parishes from Spain and the formation of the Republic of West Florida.

Thomas, followed an unguarded cow path into the fort. They easily captured the fort, killing two Spanish soldiers during the fighting. The West Florida revolution had succeeded.

For a very brief period, West Florida was an independent nation. In December 1810, however, the United States annexed the area. (To **annex** is to add territory to an already existing governmental unit, such as a city, state, or nation.) When Louisiana became a state in 1812, the Florida Parishes were not included. But in its first official act, the new state legislature annexed West Florida and made it a part of the state of Louisiana.

The Great Slave Uprising of 1811

After 1808, slaves could not be legally imported into the United States, but this did not stop the trading of slaves among the states. In addition, smugglers continued to bring slaves into Louisiana from other countries.

After the Louisiana Purchase, Louisiana's economy improved. As the plantations grew, more workers were needed. Slaves worked the valuable Louisiana crops—sugar cane and cotton. By 1812, the slave population in Louisiana was about 35,000.

As the number of slaves increased, the unrest among them spread. In 1811, a major slave uprising took place near the present-day town of Norco in St. Charles Parish. The leaders of the revolt organized the escaping slaves into companies complete with officers. They had no weapons except those they had made from farm tools.

Numbering several hundred, the slaves marched along the river toward New Orleans. Regular troops of the U.S. Army joined with the Orleans militia to stop them. Some slaves were killed in the fighting; others were executed later. Their heads were displayed on poles to remind other slaves of the punishment they could expect for rebelling.



Above: Philemon Thomas led a militia group to capture the Spanish fort at Baton Rouge, Fort San Carlos.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why did Napoleon want Louisiana? Why did he change his mind?
2. Name two challenges Governor Claiborne faced.
3. Why was the neutral zone established?
4. What are the Florida Parishes? What nation held this area before the Revolt?
5. What was the result of the West Florida Revolt?
6. How did the leaders of the slave uprising organize the group?